

Dr Gibb M.D.  
with

Dr Mackesy, Campbells

# AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED

*At the Annual Meeting of the Medical Association of Ireland,*

HELD AT

ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS, DUBLIN,

JUNE 4TH, 1866,

BY

**THOMAS LEWIS MACKESY, M.D. T.C.D. (Hon.)**

*Ex-President, Fellow and Member of Council Royal College of Surgeons;  
and President of the Medical Association of Ireland.*



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# A D D R E S S .

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The Annual Meeting of the Irish Medical Association was held on June 5th, at the Royal College of Surgeons :—

On the motion of Dr. LABATT, seconded by Dr. DARLEY, the chair was taken by

Dr. THOMAS L. MACKESY.

The CHAIRMAN, on rising, spoke as follows :—

GENTLEMEN,—The honour of addressing you from this Chair again devolves on me as President of the Irish Medical Association—an honour I value most highly, as a proof of the kind feeling and confidence of my medical brethren. The meeting of so many old and valued friends adds much to my gratification, and as I look round this crowded hall, seeing such a number of men of the highest talent and position in their profession, I feel a pride and pleasure at being the President of such an Association that I can but feebly express. As the proceedings of the Council of the Association during the year will be submitted to you in the Annual Report, I shall not enter on their details. I shall,

however, call your attention to a letter that I had the honour, as President of this Association, and as Chairman of the Medical Meeting held in December last at the Limerick Junction, to address to the General Medical Council, enclosing a resolution passed unanimously at the meeting. This letter was commented on freely without being published. I therefore forwarded a copy for publication to the Editor of THE MEDICAL PRESS AND CIRCULAR, in order to place the matter fully and fairly before the members of this Association and the profession generally. I had intended to have taken up the observations of the different members of the General Council *seriatim*. This would occupy too much of your valuable time, and the General Council having carried out my object in bringing the subject so prominently before the profession and the public, and the President, by his admission "that the Council had not done as much as they ought to have done," having confirmed the tenor of my observations, I shall leave my letter and address on the table, satisfied that the discussion at this meeting on preliminary and medical education and examination will be carried on with that good feeling, temper, and moderation that should mark the proceedings of medical men. I wish to add that, in expressing my views in firm language, I am not aware of having used any observation that could be considered disrespectful to the General Council or its distinguished members; nothing was further from my intention. I cannot, however, but express my gratification that the Irish Medical Association has been successful in directing the attention of the General Medical Council to the necessity of framing a curriculum for



preliminary education, and which, when a knowledge of Greek shall be included, will, if strictly enforced, enable the medical student to master the various subjects of medical study, and also fit him to hold that position in society, which it is so desirable both for the advantage of the patient and for the respectability of our profession, that the medical practitioner should maintain; and I trust that the Medical Council will now draw up an improved system of medical education and examination, so that incompetent persons shall not obtain diplomas in medicine or surgery. The inadequacy of existing regulations to secure these objects has been made painfully evident in the examination of candidates for the Military and Naval Medical Service. In consequence of the short time the Amended Medical Bill, as adopted by the General Council, has been before the profession, I have been unable to communicate with my medical friends on the subject; therefore, the observations I now offer must be held to represent my own private views. No man is more anxious to put down empirics than I am, and the penal clause of the Amended Bill to prevent irregular practitioners, not on the Medical Register, from assuming the title of Doctor and practising medicine, is most valuable and necessary for the protection of the public and of the profession. Other clauses of the Act are defective, and it is a matter for mature consideration how far it will be prudent to introduce such a bill at this advanced period of the session, particularly as it does not contain any clause to confer additional power on the General Council to enforce their orders on the different medical bodies empowered to grant diplomas or licences to

practise medicine or surgery ; and if such powers are not already vested in the Council under the present Act, I do not believe that any Amended Medical Act that does not confer such power will be satisfactory to the profession. I would therefore suggest, with much respect, that the General Medical Council should hold their next annual session in January or February next, make all arrangements for a full and comprehensive Medical Act prior to their meeting, and as members of Parliament are, with scarcely an exception, totally unacquainted with the requirements of the medical profession, take the necessary measures to lay those requirements before them, and have the bill introduced at the commencement of the next session. Should any medical University or College prove recusant to their orders an opportunity will be thus afforded of testing their powers by bringing the subject before the Privy Council, prior to the introduction of the bill.

The extension and amendment of our representative form of Government have recently claimed and still continue to engage a large share of public attention, and it strikes me that it would be difficult to select a more fitting opportunity than the present for again soliciting the attention of the public and of the profession to the important question of granting Parliamentary representation to the medical profession in its collective capacity. This Association may feel a just pride in having been the first medical body that has brought prominently under the notice of Government and of the profession the advantages that would be derived from an adequate representation in Parliament of the medical and surgical colleges of the United Kingdom. If my



remarks were intended only for the distinguished gentlemen I have now the honour of addressing, I should deem unnecessary to preface my observations by earnestly disclaiming, on the part of our profession, selfish or ambitious motives in seeking to send our own representatives to Parliament; but addressing myself, as I desire to do on this point, to the ear of the general public, I consider myself the humble exponent of the sentiments of this Association and of the medical profession generally, when I affirm that it is for the benefit of that public as well as for the profession that we look for medical representation. We ask to send a few distinguished members of our body to Parliament, in order that their knowledge of the laws of health, their professional experience of the sanitary defects of our large cities, and their practical skill in providing against the spread of epidemics, may be placed at the disposal of the Legislature, rendering practical and efficient the sanitary legislation of the empire, and thus adding to the health and longevity of the community at large. I do not hesitate to state that if the House of Commons had the advantage of the presence of a few medical representatives of experience and standing, to suggest and to advise on sanitary legislation, the lives of thousands might be annually saved—lives which are now sacrificed from the want of proper hygienic enactments, and the absence of practical sanitary legislation. It may be objected that the few members of our profession who, by some rare chance, have forced their way into Parliament, have not conspicuously distinguished themselves in connexion with subjects affecting the public health. This, it appears to me, is an argument in

favour of the principle of medical representation. The few medical members of the House of Commons to whom the objection may be applied were elected for political objects or for local interests; their medical qualification was an accidental circumstance that had no influence in their election. I think it must be obvious that the medical practitioners of the United Kingdom are the men who should form the constituencies (*quoad* medical representation) and be entrusted with the selection of medical members of Parliament, if such members are to occupy and deserve the elevated position which it is our hope that they will hold as the constituted guardians of the public health. It has also been objected that medical representation would be a class representation. It has, however, in the recent debates on the Reform Bill been put forward that all classes should be adequately represented in the British House of Commons, and it is now universally admitted that intellect and education possess the strongest claims to representation. The present unrepresented state of the medical profession (a profession remarkable for the high education and intellectual attainments of many of its members) becomes the more conspicuous when contrasted with the other learned professions. The Church has for its support in the House of Commons the representatives of the Universities, and in the House of Lords the bench of Bishops, men of the highest class of intelligence, who bring to bear for its support the energy and the talent which have gained for them the exalted position they have attained. The legal profession, furnishing numerous candidates for high offices of state, most easily to be won by a course of political life sends



a large number of its members into the Legislature, and although this profession is not represented in its collective capacity, yet, holding out, as it does, to the ambition of its members the attainment of such influential posts as those of Attorney and Solicitor-Generals, Lord Advocate, &c., in the House of Commons, and having at its head the President of the House of Lords, its interests are amply provided for, and at the same time the public is benefitted by the advice and council of this numerous, highly educated and talented body of men on all matters in which their special information may be useful. The representatives of the legal profession may be said to be the skilled advisers of the Legislature upon all questions which either directly or indirectly come within the sphere of their special attainments. The medical profession, on the contrary, is almost totally unrepresented in Parliament, and yet how often do questions affecting the health of towns, the mortality of our infant population, the legislative regulation of trades injurious to the health of our factory operatives, the pollution of public streams, the poisonous effects of gaseous exhalations incidental to several branches of our manufacturing industry, the sale of poisons, and several other social subjects, come under the consideration of Parliament, on all of which it would be difficult to exaggerate the value and importance of practical advice and guidance in committee on the part of medical practitioners of experience and sound scientific attainments? The presence of such men in the House of Commons would render unnecessary the circuitous and expensive resort to Royal Commissions of Inquiry, which have hitherto been the only means within the

reach of Parliament for gaining the required information from the very class of men that we, as a body, would select and depute to represent our interests and those of the public health in the Commons House of Parliament. Aware of this deficiency in the Council of the nation the Medical Association, in 1858, passed unanimously the following resolution :—

“That, considering the numbers, respectability, and special acquirements of the medical profession in these kingdoms, neither its interests or its views, on questions affecting the health of the community, are adequately represented in Parliament; that our President and Secretary be requested to communicate with the Medical Colleges and Associations of the empire, to impress on them the necessity of bringing before the Prime Minister the claims of the medical profession in its collective capacity to Parliamentary representation,”

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, always foremost in supporting the dignity and interest of our profession, at once took earnest action in drawing up the following petition, which places our claims in clear and intelligible language.—

*“To the Knights, Citizens, and Burgesses, in Parliament assembled :*

“THE PETITION OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS  
IN IRELAND,

“HUMBLY SHEWETH,—That the importance of judicious sanitary legislation has been for some time generally acknowledged.

“That little progress has as yet been made in applying medical science to the preservation of the public health, in consequence of the want in the Imperial Parliament of medical men, qualified, by educated intellect, to propose and arrange those hygienic measures necessary for health and longevity.

“ That efficient legislation for this purpose is not likely to be adopted until medical representatives shall be retained as members of Parliament.

“ That the medical members of the House of Commons should be elected by medical constituencies, as the best guarantee for the selection of men possessing the scientific acquirements and the sound practical knowledge of their profession that will fit them to decide on all hygienic and medical subjects.

“ Impressed with these views, the President, Vice-President, and Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland, claim for their College a representation in the Commons House of Parliament.

“ The Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland, from its first formation, has uniformly maintained a high standard of education. There are at present registered Fellows on the roll of the College, 397 ; and Licentiates, 1,210 ; total, 1,607 ; so that a large constituency could be found of men of high education, intelligence, and liberality, both of thought and action, having intimate relations with all classes of society, and being thus enabled to judge with accuracy of the measures required for the relief of the sick poor and for the health of the community.

“ The medical profession, unlike the legal and other interests, is totally unrepresented in the Imperial Parliament. Its duties restrict the sphere of its influence very much to private life, and its members are not generally in the habit of coming before the public or engaging in political contest ; therefore, the only way for their entrance to Parliament is by medical representation being granted to medical constituencies.

“ The President, Vice-President, and Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland, therefore pray your honourable House that in any measure of reform, provision shall be made



for granting a representative in the House of Commons to the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

“ And your petitioners will ever pray.”

I think it would not be difficult for our profession to send to the House of Commons representatives whose attainments and reputation would shed additional lustre upon the muster roll of that distinguished assembly. In England there is a medical constituency of nearly 15,000; in Ireland about 2,500; in Scotland about 1,700; making a total of about 19,000 men of high education and special attainments, who, from their intimate intercourse with all classes of society, are thoroughly acquainted with the habits and wants of the community at large, and especially the sick poor, a class which furnishes such constant subject matter for legislative enactments. The non-political character of the constituency the medical profession would afford, would impart an influence and a scientific character to our representatives which would lend additional weight to their views upon all questions affecting the public health. Finally, no cumbrous machinery would be required for recording the votes of our profession for special representatives. The Medical Register gives the registry of voters, and it would only remain to issue voting papers, the same as the Universities. In conclusion, I beg, gentlemen, to return you thanks for the attention with which you have honoured me.

## IRISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Feb. 27, 1866.

SIR,—As President of the Irish Medical Association and Chairman of a meeting of the Medical Profession in Ireland, I enclose a copy of a resolution passed unanimously.

The meeting, called on a requisition signed by about 270 Physicians and Surgeons, was held at the Limerick Junction on 28th December last, and was numerously attended.

Together with the resolution to which I wish to draw the attention of the Medical Council, I beg to enclose a copy of my address on the occasion, and to request you will submit both papers to the General Council of Medical Education and Registration of the United Kingdom.

In a letter I have recently received from an influential member of the Medical Council, the writer, in referring to my address, says:—"You have fallen into a mistake on the first page in complaining that the Council had not drawn up and enforced on the different medical bodies empowered under their respective charters, &c., &c., uniform system, &c., &c. The Medical Council has no power to enforce any course of study or examination. They tried it with the University of Edinburgh, in the second year of their existence, and were beaten. The several Corporations may do as they like, and and in the present state of free trade and under-selling one another for the profits of diplomas, I see no hope of any amendment."

Under such circumstances, I trust the General Council will no longer delay in making application to Parliament for an amended bill, granting to the Council full power to enforce a uniform system of preliminary and medical education on all medical bodies chartered and empowered to grant diplomas or licences in medicine and surgery. I believe the Council would be supported in this application by every medical practitioner in the United Kingdom who has at heart the true

interest of the public and the honour of our profession, as the present state of free trade and under-selling for the profit of diplomas is injurious to the community at large, and lowering to the *status* and character of medicine and surgery. Medical registration can be of no advantage if it does not guarantee that the legally registered physician and surgeon has been regularly educated and fully competent to discharge the responsible duties of his profession.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient servant,

THOMAS L. MACKESY, M.D., Chairman.

To Dr. F. Hawkins, Registrar.

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RESOLUTION UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED AT THE MEDICAL MEETING HELD AT THE LIMERICK JUNCTION, DECEMBER 28TH, 1865.

“*Resolved*— That the Medical Reform Act as carried out by the Medical Council has failed in securing for the Medical Profession the advantages originally intended, and that no adequate return has been given for the expenses incurred : We, therefore, suggest that a *uniform curriculum* of high preliminary education, and of Professional and Scientific Study, be adopted for all licensing bodies, empowered under the Act to grant Licenses or Diplomas in Medicine or Surgery, as the best means of maintaining the respectability and status of the Profession, and of securing to the public competent Practitioners in Medicine and Surgery.”

Signed,

THOMAS L. MACKESY, M.D., CHAIRMAN.

EDWARD J. QUINAN, M.D.,  
CHARLES ARMSTRONG, M.D., } HON. SECS.





